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DAKAR PLS PASS ODC, DAO, AND RAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GA](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: FURTHER STRAINS IN TIES WITH SENEGAL  
OVER CASAMANCE

REF: BANJUL 243 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

ESCALATING TENSIONS OVER CASAMANCE  
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11. (C) In May 15 conversation with Ambassador, knowledgeable journalistic source spoke of growing strains in Senegalese/Gambian ties, saying a senior Gambian official, the National Intelligence Agency's head, had recently expressed concern to him privately that the GOS might close Senegal's border with The Gambia "at any time." (NOTE: During a severe bilateral dispute over transportation issues, the Senegalese closed their border with The Gambia during August/October 2005. The closure caused substantial damage to the Gambian economy, as vitally needed imports from Senegal halted, as did The Gambia's re-export trade in the sub-region. END NOTE)

12. (C) According to our source, while the still-pending verdict in the trial of five Senegalese customs officials was a factor in the escalating tensions (reftel), the main reason was the GOTG's meddling in the Casamance conflict. He said the GOTG's unhelpful posture came through in a recent "Walfajri" radio interview in Senegal with "moderate" MFDC figures. They reportedly claimed that the GOTG was supplying weapons to MFDC hard-liners opposed to peace efforts and continuing to provide sanctuary in The Gambia to a leading hard-liner, Salif Sadio, and his supporters. (NOTE: Our source discounted recent reports of Sadio's killing, insisting that he had only been wounded and was likely recovering somewhere in The Gambia. END NOTE) In the interview, our source continued, the MFDC reps also complained about Gambian authorities' ongoing detention of MFDC figures cooperating in GOS peace efforts, putting the number of detainees at seven. (COMMENT: Per reftel, we had been aware of three leading MFDC figures in custody here. We believe the trio and perhaps other MFDC elements have been in detention for months. To our knowledge, the GOTG has given no explanation for the detentions, although we note May 14 report by the U.S.-based online "Freedom Journal" claiming the GOTG's detention of three "MFDC fighters" for alleged links to anti-GOTG dissidents, e.g. former Chief of Defense Staff Ndure Cham, presumed mastermind of the failed coup plot here in March 2006. END COMMENT)

COMMENT  
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13. (C) In Ambassador's May 8 conversation with Senegalese Ambassador Mamadou Fall (reftel), he had pointed to mounting irritation in Dakar over Gambian "provocations," although he had ruled out any abrupt GOS retaliatory move, such as a

repetition of the 2005 border closure. That a Gambian official of the NIA head's stature -- a personal contact of our source -- would raise the possibility of a renewed border closure suggests the depth of concern in GOTG circles over the escalating strains with Senegal. The question now is whether the erratic Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, just back from a trip to Venezuela and Cuba (septel), can be persuaded to ease up on the mischief-making in the Casamance and otherwise work to reduce tensions -- e.g., having the detained Senegalese customs officials released without further prosecution. While Gambian officials are generally unwilling to discuss the GOTG's Casamance policy in any detail -- confining themselves to pat assertions of Gambian support for peace efforts -- Ambassador will raise the dossier in scheduled meeting May 16 with the Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary and urge that the GOTG do its part to ease tensions.   END COMMENT  
STAFFORD